

## DISCOVERY OF THE WILD STATE OF RYE.

Both history and botany agree in rendering it probable that the Cerealia (wheat, barley, rye, and oats) come originally from Asia, especially from the western and central regions of that part of the world. Unfortunately it is difficult to prove the truth of the hypothesis by facts. This would require the discovery of specimens apparently wild in such conditions that they cannot be suspected to have escaped from cultivation, or to have been sown by travellers. Michaux the elder found spelt (*Triticum Spelta*) on a mountain four days' journey from Hamadan\*. Olivier†, travelling with a caravan from Anah to Latakia, on the right bank of the Euphrates, says, "We found near the camp, in a kind of ravine, wheat, barley, and spelt, which we had already seen several times in Mesopotamia." Linnæus‡ gives as the country of summer corn (*Triticum æstivum*) the country of the Baschirs, *apud Baschiros in campis*, on the authority of a traveller named Heinzelmänn. I am not acquainted with any other certain testimony as to the origin of the Cerealia. M. Dureau de la Malle§ does not consider them sufficient, because the travellers did not remain long enough in the country to distinguish with certainty the wild individual from the individual derived from forsaken cultivation. I would however observe that the countries in question are mountainous, very sterile, and thinly peopled by unsettled tribes. The assertion of Linnæus, which is accompanied by no details, is that which deserves the least confidence, the more so as the country of the Baschirs has been frequently visited within a century. Link|| does not admit it. M. Loiseleur-Deslongchamps¶, in a modern and special work, does not bring forward any new facts. He states, with reason, that the primitive country of these species may have originally been very extensive, but that cultivation having been early established in Sicily, Greece, Syria, &c., it has always been difficult to distinguish the wild specimens from those which have escaped from cultivation. He adds, with still greater reason, that if the Cerealia were different primitively from what they now are—if, for instance, they had had the form of certain *Ægylops* or *Lolium*,—man would never have had the idea of cultivating them. The species must have been very much like what they now are to have led to any being at the pains to sow them. Has any barbarous people ever been observed to attempt the cultivation of *Ægylops* or of darnel (*Lolium temulentum*)? Naturalists may have the curiosity to do so: the primitive peoples never had: it is much, indeed, that they essayed to eat the grain of wheat, and to cultivate it, after having ascertained its nutritious properties.

In all the works above quoted, rye is not mentioned unless to

\* Lamarek, Dict. Ency., Part. Bot. ii. 560.

† Voyage dans l'Empire Ottoman, iii. 460.

‡ Species Plantarum, 2nd edit. 126.

§ Recherches sur l'Histoire ancienne, l'origine et la patrie des Céréales, Ann. Scien. Nat. Ser. 1. ix. 61.

|| Die Urwelt und das Alterthum, &c. ed. 2. p. 407.

¶ Considérations sur les Céréales, 1843, p. 22.

state that its country is unknown, but that from analogy it is probably Western Asia. "Rye is supposed to come from the Levant," says M. Eude Deslongchamps, in the 'Dictionnaire des Sciences Naturelles,' vol. xlvi. p. 310. According to M. Kunth\* it is a native of the countries near the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea, but he does not cite any proof. All this is as vague as the assertion of other ancient and modern authors relative to the Isle of Crete. The rye which Marshall of Biberstein found on the Caucasus, and which he supposed to be common rye, is now found to be the *Secale fragile*, a different species. M. C. Koch†, a traveller who has traversed Anatolia, Armenia, the Caucasus and Crimea, now affirms that he has found rye under circumstances where it appears to be really spontaneous and native. I quote verbally: "On the mountains of Pont, not far from the village of Dshmil, in the country of Hemschin, upon granite, at an elevation of 5000 or 6000 feet, I found our common rye alongside my road (*an Rändern*). It was thin in the ear, and about 1 to 2½ inches long. No one remembered that it had ever been cultivated in the neighbourhood; it was not even known as a cereal. I have received the same ears, thin and short, from M. Thirke, at Brussa. If I am not mistaken, he had gathered them on Mount Olympus or in the neighbourhood. I but seldom found that rye was cultivated, for example in the countries of Kur, of Artaban, &c."

The question appears to be decided by the details given by M. Koch, and in the way that history and botanical geography rendered most likely.—A. DeCandolle in the *Bibliothèque Universelle de Genève*, June 1849.

PRESIDENCY OF THE LINNÆAN SOCIETY.

The 'Athenæum,' in noticing Mr. Robert Brown's acceptance of the unanimous invitation of the Council of the Linnæan Society to allow himself to be nominated for the presidency, favours the Society with the following sapient suggestion:—"It has not transpired whether the invitation has or has not been received conditionally by Mr. Brown. There is a strong feeling among the Fellows in favour of a biennial election to the presidency." We need hardly say that this statement is wholly without foundation, and merely the impudent assertion of the anonymous writer who has obtruded it upon the public.—R. T.

*On the pulverulent matter which covers the surface of the body of Lixus and other Insects.*

Several insects exhibit, on their surface, various pulverulent substances, very analogous to cryptogamic vegetations, but merely in abnormal cases, which terminate in the death of the animal. The species of *Lixus*, and some exotic Coleoptera, exhibit, in their healthy state, a quantity of a yellow powder on their elytra, which is reproduced when artificially removed.

From the observations of MM. Boulbène and Follin it appears that this powder presents sporules, filaments, and, in a word, all the

\* Enumeratio Plant. vol. i. p. 449. † Linnæa, vol. xxi. p. 427, 1848.